

Opening Statement for Rep. Joseph Pitts
Health Subcommittee Markup of Five Bills to
“Setting Fiscal Priorities in Health Care Funding”
(Remarks Prepared for Delivery)

Today, we are marking up five bills:

- H.R. 1213, a bill to repeal mandatory funding provided to States in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act to establish American Health Benefit Exchanges (Upton);
- H.R. 1214, a bill to repeal mandatory funding for school-based health center construction (Burgess);
- H.R. 1215, a bill to amend title V of the Social Security Act to convert funding for personal responsibility education programs from direct appropriations to an authorization of appropriations (Latta);
- H.R. 1216, a bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to convert funding for graduate medical education in qualified teaching health centers from direct appropriations to an authorization of appropriations (Guthrie); and
- H.R. 1217, a bill to repeal the Prevention and Public Health Fund (Pitts).

My bill, H.R. 1217, repeals Sec. 4002 of PPACA. This section establishes a Prevention and Public Health Fund "to provide for expanded and sustained national investment in prevention and public health programs to improve health and help restrain the rate of growth in private and public sector health care costs."

In the current fiscal environment, we need to ask ourselves several key questions.

First, should the federal government be involved in health promotion and prevention activities? One could argue yes, but the more important (or relevant) question is whether the amount of money going to the Prevention and Public Health Fund is proper and responsible, and, should the stream of funding for these activities be mandatory and self-appropriating or discretionary and subject to Congressional oversight each year?

Sec. 4002 authorizes the appropriation of, *and appropriates to the fund from the Treasury*, the following amounts: \$500 million for FY2010; \$750 million for FY2011; \$1.00 billion for FY2012; \$1.25 billion for FY2013; \$1.50 billion for FY2014; and for FY2015 and every fiscal year thereafter \$2.00 billion.

Additionally, the Secretary has the full authority to use this account to fund any programs or activities under the Public Health Service Act that she chooses, without Congressional oversight.

The universe of potential uses of this funding is as vast as the bill is vague in setting out how the money should be spent.

Already, HHS has sent money out the door “to support prevention activities and develop the nation’s public health infrastructure,” to “expand the primary care workforce,” and for various prevention activities such as preventing tobacco use, obesity, heart disease, stroke, and other diseases, and increasing immunizations.

I think all of these uses sound worthwhile; however, all of them – smoking cessation, heart disease prevention, increasing immunizations – are already being supported through other funding streams.

The Prevention and Public Health Fund is funding over and above the amount Congress has specifically decided should go towards these activities and over and above the amount Congress has already appropriated for these activities.

And it is disbursed at the sole discretion of one individual: the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

When Secretary Sebelius was here in front of our Subcommittee, I asked her whether she needed further Congressional approval to spend the money from the Fund, and she answered no.

I then asked her if she could fund activities at levels higher than what Congress appropriated, and she stated yes.

Congress has the power to direct how federal funds may be spent. It is our responsibility to see that they are spent properly. It is our job to conduct oversight over the Executive Branch.

Sec. 4002 is simply an abdication of Congressional responsibility and a slush fund from which the Secretary can spend without our input, oversight, or approval.

This should be of concern to every Member of Congress.

Let’s remember, by eliminating this fund, we are not cutting any specific program or activity. We are reclaiming our oversight role of how federal taxpayer dollars should be used.

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